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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Written statement submitted by North-South XXI, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[13 March 1997]

1. The "peace process", which has taken a direction extremely detrimental to the Palestinian people, has come to a standstill. Several thousand Palestinian prisoners of conscience are still in prison, the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories - particularly in East Jerusalem, where 6,500 dwellings have been allocated to Jewish settlers - are continuing to expand, the Israeli authorities continue to deny the Palestinian people's right to form a State and the Israeli army still occupies portions of Lebanon and Syria.

2. This non-comprehensive list of overt violations of international law and of hundreds of resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council since 1969 is a sign of the Israeli State's total indifference to the standards generally recognized by the international community.

3. It is only with the indulgent complicity of the United States that the Israeli State is able to follow a policy of systematic infringement of human rights and the rights of peoples. It is obvious that many States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) totally ignore human rights violations on the part of the Israeli authorities while condemning similar

acts committed by other States. This discriminatory position, whereby leniency and severity are alternated not according to the seriousness of the human rights violations, but according to the nature of the State responsible for them and of its relations with the United States, brings discredit not only upon international law, but also upon any mention of human rights. These States and NGOs lose any claim to legitimacy by invoking international law as a basis for their statements and actions. The Palestinian question is the touchstone for any genuine - rather than purely political - commitment to the rule of law and human rights. Indeed, few States in the international community have shown as little respect as Israel for the standards of international law and, as a result, been the subject of so many resolutions condemning their actions, without suffering the slightest consequences. Such an attitude on the part of other States would result in a proliferation of conflicts, put an end to international law - at least as generally interpreted - and make human rights conventions wholly ineffective.

4. Since the greatest paradox, and the most flagrant human rights violations, are exemplified by the situation of the Palestinian prisoners, incarcerated in worsening conditions despite the agreements signed and the periodic negotiations between the parties to the conflict, it is urgent for the Commission on Human Rights to adopt a resolution calling for a fact-finding mission to the Israeli prisons, to be carried out by State delegations in partnership with willing NGOs in order to learn about the conditions of detention and contribute to the release of the prisoners.